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Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly

Report on Harassing and Abusive Telephone Calls to the Chairman of the Standing Committee on Resources Development

3rd Session 33rd Parliament
36 Elizabeth II



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE

TORONTO, ONTARIO
M7A 1A2

The Honourable Hugh Edighoffer, M.P.P.,
Speaker of the Legislative Assembly.

Sir,

Your Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly has
the honour to present its Report and commends it to the
House.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading 'Michael Breough'.

Michael J. Breough, M.P.P.
Chairman

Queen's Park
18 June 1987



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Clerk of the Committee

On 5 February 1987, the Chairman of the Standing Committee on Resources Development, Floyd Laughren, M.P.P., raised a question of privilege in the House with respect to the harassment and personal abuse to which he had been subjected by persons who were opposed to Bill 115, An Act to amend the Ontario Lottery Corporation Act, which was before the Committee for public hearings and clause-by-clause consideration.

On motion by Mr Laughren, the matter was referred to the Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly (see Appendix I for the proceedings in the House).

On 3 June 1987, the Chairman of the Standing Committee on Resources Development appeared before your Committee to give evidence concerning the harassing and abusive telephone calls which he had received. At this meeting, Mr Laughren requested that, in view of the fact that the Bill had been reported to the House and was awaiting third reading, no further action be taken by the Committee or the House on the matter.

Your Committee concurs with Mr Laughren's request and recommends to the House that no further action be taken with respect to the harassment and personal abuse to which Mr Laughren was subjected while the Standing Committee on Resources Development was considering Bill 115.

In the last decade, committees of the House have actively encouraged persons to participate in the legislative process by presenting oral and written briefs on the various matters which are before the committees. The committees have benefitted a great deal from the advice and comments offered.

However, your Committee wishes to remind all persons that direct threats which attempt to influence a member's action in the House or in a committee or which are meant to obstruct the business of the House are breaches of parliamentary privilege for which punishment may be executed pursuant to the Legislative Assembly Act.

The Committee recognizes that such threats are often made anonymously over the telephone or by letter and it is in most cases not possible to deal satisfactorily with them. However, the Committee is of the opinion that obstructing, threatening or attempting to force or intimidate a member or committee of the Assembly is a serious matter which the House should not disregard if evidence is available to clearly identify the person or persons committing the offence.

Your Committee recommends that in all cases in which a member or his or her staff receive threatening or abusive telephone calls or letters at their Queen's Park offices, the member notify immediately the Sergeant-at-Arms. If the telephone call or letter is received in the constituency office or at the member's residence, the member or his or her staff or family should notify immediately the local police force.

An investigation may then be undertaken by the ordinary forces of the law and a report made thereon. In the case of an investigation of threatening or abusive telephone calls or letters received at Queen's Park, the report of the Sergeant-at-Arms should be delivered to the Speaker and the member concerned.

A P P E N D I X I

HANSARD
OFFICIAL REPORT OF DEBATES

Legislative Assembly of Ontario

Second Session, 33rd Parliament

Thursday, February 5, 1987

No. 99

MEMBERS' PRIVILEGES

Mr. Laughren: On a point of privilege, Mr. Speaker: On November 20, this Legislature passed for second reading the Ontario Lottery Corporation Amendment Act. It was passed by all three parties and then referred to the standing committee on resources development. We proceeded to schedule hearings for this week, and they are continuing today.

Since Monday, as chairman of that committee responsible for the scheduling, I have been subjected to harassment and personal abuse by people who are opposed to this bill. I have been called a liar, a crook, and accused of taking a bribe from the Ontario Lottery Corp. I have received telephone messages from a Dr. Cyanide and from the Slaughterhouse Corp.

I have made arrangements for security measures in the committee this afternoon, but I can say that in my 15 years as a member, I have been lobbied by a wide diversity of organizations and individuals and not once have I been lobbied in a way that I thought was inappropriate until this week. I find it totally unacceptable that any member of this assembly should be subjected to that kind of lobbying simply because that member is doing his or her job. It is not because it is I who am involved in this case; I do not think any member should be subjected to that kind of harassment simply for trying to do the job.

I would ask that this entire matter be referred to the standing committee on the Legislative Assembly.

Hon. Mr. Peterson: This is the first I have heard of this situation, but I completely support every remark the honourable member made. He will have the support of the government in fulfilling his ambitions in this regard. We cannot tolerate any of that kind of harassment in this House. The member is quite right to bring it to the attention of the House. He will have whatever security arrangements are necessary for the committee, for himself, or for anyone else who goes into this.

You may want to investigate this even further, Mr. Speaker, through police investigations or whatever. That should not go on in the circumstances. If the member recommends it, knowing the details personally and intimately, we can certainly have the Ontario Provincial Police look into the matter.

Mr. Stevenson: On behalf of our party, and being a member of the resources development committee, I would say we have also been receiving a number of phone calls, some of them fairly forceful, but at least to my office none of them intimidating. I do, however, certainly take the member at his word. Assuming the calls are what he says they are, we certainly support that the matter be looked into.

Mr. Speaker: Are there any other comments? As the member for Nickel Belt (Mr. Laughren) has brought this matter to the attention of the members of the House, supported by the other two members who have spoken, it would appear to me that it is the feeling of the House that there may be a possibility of a case of privilege. If the member desires to present a motion to the House, I think that would be in order.

Do you wish to make a motion now?

Mr. Laughren: If it is appropriate to do it in a verbal way, I will do so.

Mr. Speaker: Mr. Laughren moves that this matter be referred to the standing committee on the Legislative Assembly.

Motion agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: As usual, we prefer the motion in writing, if the member would present that to the chair.

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